Unusual Entertainment Acts Once Thrilled Fairbury Fair Crowds

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For many years, the Fairbury Fair has been known for its livestock shows, horse racing, and agricultural exhibits. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fairgoers were also treated to a wide variety of unusual and sometimes daring entertainment acts. Some of these performances were so spectacular that they drew thousands of people to Fairbury.

One of the most remarkable attractions ever presented at the Fairbury Fair occurred in 1899. That year, crowds watched in amazement as Miss Ida LeRoy performed a dangerous balloon and parachute stunt high above the fairgrounds.

The performance began with a large hot-air balloon that was inflated on the fairgrounds. Suspended beneath the balloon was a heavy cannon. Miss LeRoy climbed into the mouth of the cannon with her parachute strapped to her back. When everything was ready, the balloon was released from its moorings and slowly rose high into the sky.

Once the balloon had reached an altitude of several thousand feet, a signal was given. The cannon was then fired, launching Miss LeRoy high into the air. As the crowd watched from the ground, she fell rapidly before her parachute opened and carried her safely back to earth. It must have been an unforgettable sight for the audience at the 1899 Fairbury Fair.

Balloon ascensions and parachute jumps were popular attractions at county and state fairs during the late nineteenth century. Before the days of airplanes and modern amusement rides, these aerial exhibitions were considered extremely thrilling. Crowds often gathered by the thousands to watch daring aeronauts perform high above the fairgrounds.

In addition to balloon ascensions, the Fairbury Fair featured many other unusual entertainment acts during its early years. Traveling performers moved from fair to fair across the Midwest, bringing a variety of spectacles designed to attract large crowds.

Some of the performers were acrobats and aerial artists who performed high above the ground on ropes, trapezes, or tall poles. Others were magicians, comedians, or novelty acts who entertained audiences in front of the grandstand. These acts were often promoted in newspaper advertisements as the most daring or exciting performances ever attempted.

Animals were also a common part of fair entertainment. In the early twentieth century, trained animal acts were frequently included in the free grandstand shows. These performances sometimes featured trained dogs, horses, or even exotic animals.

The Blade frequently advertised these entertainment acts in the days leading up to the fair. Newspaper advertisements often promised the most thrilling attractions ever seen in Livingston County. These promotions were intended to encourage people from surrounding towns and rural areas to travel to Fairbury for the fair.

During this era, many visitors arrived in Fairbury by horse-drawn wagons or by railroad. Special excursion trains were sometimes arranged to bring large crowds to the fairgrounds. When the weather was good and the entertainment acts were especially exciting, attendance at the fair could reach several thousand people.

The unusual entertainment acts helped make the Fairbury Fair an important regional event. Families could spend the day visiting livestock exhibits, viewing agricultural displays, and meeting friends from neighboring communities. In the afternoon and evening, they could gather at the grandstand to watch the featured entertainment.

Over time, the types of entertainment at the fair began to change. By the early twentieth century, automobile racing and other modern attractions began to appear at the fairgrounds. Motion pictures, radio, and eventually television also provided new forms of entertainment that were not available to earlier generations.

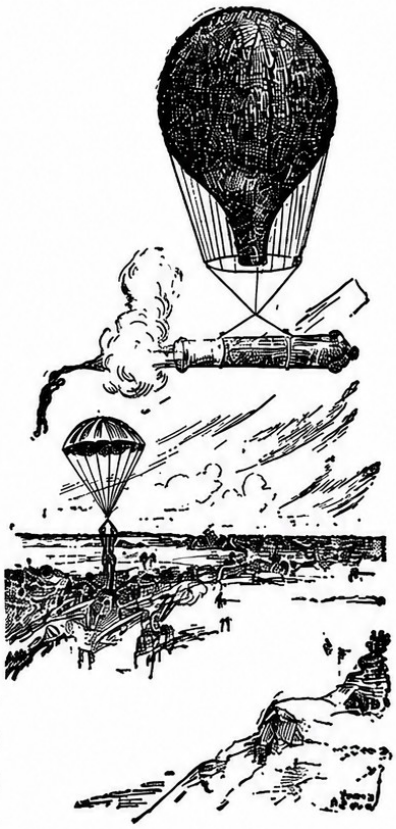
Despite these changes, the early entertainment acts remain an interesting part of the Fairbury Fair's history. Performances such as the daring balloon stunt of Miss Ida LeRoy captured the imagination of fairgoers and created memories that people talked about for many years afterward.

The Fairbury Fair is now celebrating its 150th anniversary. While the attractions have changed over time, the fair continues to bring together people from Fairbury and surrounding communities. The unusual entertainment acts of earlier fairs remind us of a time when a balloon ascension or a parachute jump high above the fairgrounds could thrill an entire crowd and become one of the most talked-about events of the year.

Shot From a Cannon While In Mid=Air.

One of the most daring feats ever attempted will be performed by

Miss Ida LeRoy.



A monster balloon is inflated with hot air, a huge loaded cannon is suspended from the ropes, into the mouth of which the iron-nerved aeronaut crawls, taking her parachute with her. Everything is then made ready and the balloon is released from its fastenings, rises majestically and sails upward toward the clouds. When it has reached a height of three or four thousand feet, a signal is fired and the great cannon belches forth its precious load of human freight with a mighty boom. The lady and her parachute are hurled into space, the parachute opening and carrying her safely to earth. This is without a doubt the most daring, as well as the most thrilling feature of the nineteenth century.

The ad above appeared in the Fairbury *Blade* in 1899 to entice local residents to attend the Fairbury Fair to see this very unusual and dangerous entertainment act. Miss Ida LeRoy successfully performed her daring act at the 1899 Fairbury Fair.